

WIC PROGRAM INCREASES CONSUMPTION OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

HICKORY, NC – According to newly released state data, the Catawba County Public Health Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program had the third highest redemption rate, 62.9%, of Farmers Market Nutritional Program vouchers in North Carolina last year.

The rate represents a significant increase from the county's 2012 redemption rate of 51.29%. The statewide average, which tends to hover around 50%, was 47.43% in 2012.

To make it easier for WIC clients to redeem these vouchers, Catawba County Public Health established a new weekly WIC-certified farmers market in its parking lot. Open to the public, the market's goals were to increase farmers market access for WIC clients and enable increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables across the community.



In addition, WIC staff proactively collected names of WIC clients interested in receiving farmers market vouchers and called them to schedule pick-ups when the vouchers were available. To maximize their use, an incentive program – Bonus Bucks – was developed through community donations to provide WIC clients with an extra \$4 to spend in conjunction with their farmers market vouchers at the Public Health Farmers Market.

“Our WIC program is constantly working to provide education and access to nutritious foods, and we’re excited to see that our efforts around the Public Health Farmers Market helped more people purchase fresh, local fruits and vegetables,” said Julie Byrd, WIC Director, Catawba County Public Health. “With March being National Nutrition Month, it’s a good reminder that everyone should be aiming to eat healthier by filling half their plates with fruits and vegetables.”

Obesity is a health priority in Catawba County, where 38.1% of children ages 2-18 are overweight or obese. In addition, Catawba County is home to six food deserts (areas where access to a grocery store is up to 10 miles away from where residents live, and where transportation is a barrier) in rural and urban areas.

The Catawba County Public Health Farmers Market, which is located in one of these food deserts, will return June 2014 and will accept SNAP/EBT benefits in addition to WIC vouchers, cash, and debit, becoming one of the first markets in the county to accept SNAP benefits.

WIC is a federal supplemental nutrition program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and children up to age five. The goal of the program is to help prevent nutrition-related problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. WIC food vouchers are redeemable at participating food stores and farmers’ markets for nutritional foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, milk, juice, eggs, cheese and cereal. WIC also provides nutrition and breastfeeding counseling. The Catawba County WIC office serves more than 4,000 participants a month.

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Located off Fairgrove Church Road behind Catawba Valley Medical Center in Hickory, N.C., Catawba County Public Health provides health and education services to eligible men, women, and children in the community. For more information, please call (828) 695-5800 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

“Leading the Way to a Healthier Community”